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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON TRANSFER OF SOVEREIGNTY TO
IRAQ

Summary

-- Front-page reports in all papers today, July 1, highlight issues related to Saddam Hussein's trial and his appearance in court. All papers also highlight Foreign Minister Muasher's remarks, focusing on Jordan's decision to appoint an ambassador to Iraq and on Muasher's description of Saddam's trial and the handover of sovereignty as Iraqi internal affairs in which Jordan will not get involved.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Trying the past and correcting the balance of justice"

Daily columnist Mahmoud Rimawi writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (07/01): "Speeding procedures for prosecuting members of the former regime seems a little hasty from the political point of view. One finds oneself agreeing with others who say that the priority under the current circumstances is national reconciliation, establishing security, and speeding the end of the occupation. One is convinced that once actual sovereignty is achieved . the activation of the judiciary and the start of any prosecution measures would be more appropriate, since they would not be suspected of any influence from whatever source.. At the end of the day, what is required at this stage is not to resort to the logic of vengeance and fall under the pressure of past bitterness, but rather it is achieving a victory for the principle of justice and to present a new model for a new Iraq, where authoritarianism and blind exercise of power have no place. This requires an effort not to slide into modernized dictatorship, where change is limited to formalities and new faces and new names. The point is for core change to take place."

-- "Not before the elections!"

Columnist Saleh Qallab writes on the back-page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (07/01): "Saddam Hussein's trial will not take place until after the U.S. elections. U.S. President George Bush, who is currently waging a difficult elections battle, would not want to open doors that bring in new cold winds and it would be better for him to keep this file closed until the battle is over.. Saddam Hussein, if placed before media cameras, will have to say everything, revealing a lot about the secrets of the Iraq-Iran war and the American role in it, and talking about his previous relations with Rumsfeld. He will also talk about the story of the weapons of mass destruction and about the aerial photos that American satellites used to provide him with on a daily basis about the battles with Iran. Of course, Saddam Hussein will talk about the details of his arrest and will reveal the truth about the faade of the 'spider hole' and whether the Americans were really the ones who captured him.. Saddam Hussein was handed over to the Iraqis and to the temporary government yesterday, but this handover is just a formality. He will remain silent and will not be allowed to talk . until after the U.S. presidential elections".

-- "Who is going to try him?"

Columnist Hayat Hweik Atiyeh writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (07/01): "Why was Chalabi chosen to lead the trial of Saddam Hussein? Does this Iraqi lawyer, who worked for years with a law firm owned by an Israeli lawyer known to be close to the Likud and to Sharon, have the right to prosecute the Iraqi president? Under the law, any law, this man could himself be put on trial. Iraq was and continues to be up to this moment

(legally speaking) at war with Israel, and thus for an Iraqi citizen to cooperate with another Israeli person is as good as grand treason. How could a person accused of a crime such as this head a court and issue verdicts? This is from a purely legal point of view. As from the political viewpoint, the issue is far more serious: it means that the trial of the Iraqi president and leadership had been prepared in an Israeli law office and was sent over in full with an Iraqi lawyer."

-- "Nasserites in Lebanon and Saddamism in Jordan"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (07/01): "The enthusiasm for Saddam Hussein and the Saddamism that we see these days in Amman, I believe, exceeds any power and influence that the deposed president has even in his own homeland. Some of us are more preoccupied with the fate of this man and his team than we are with the fate of Iraq and its people. The number of Jordanians who enthusiastically defend him are more than their Iraqi counterparts. What is strange is that this enthusiasm did not wane at all despite the exposed scandals, human rights violations and crimes committed against the Iraqi people under the former regime. What is even stranger is that some of those who are the most enthusiastic about defending the deposed president are, at the same time, the most enthusiastic about talking of freedom, democracy, pluralism and human rights in Jordan. True, the post-Saddam era was not up to the level of promises and accomplishments for Iraq and Iraqis and the entire Arab nation. Yet, the one thing that no one can contest is that the occupation's crimes and dirty practices can never be sufficient justification for defending Saddam and his regime. This is a formula that Iraqis realized a long time ago as they shouted against both the former regime and the residing occupation."

GNEHM